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Poion and Poiotes in Stoic Philosophy

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The second category, *poia*, is the most puzzling of the four Stoic categories.[1] The general term *poion* (qualified) included the *koinôs poion* (generically qualified) and the *idiôs poion* (individually qualified), but the relationship between these two concepts is by no means clear. It is even more difficult to see how they were connected with the *idia poiotês* (particular quality) and the *koinê poiotês* (common quality). In order to explain how the four terms were related, I shall undertake in this paper as thorough an investigation as possible of a diaeresis described by Boethius in his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*.

Boethius outlines a diaeresis of possible and necessary propositions in Stoic philosophy. He writes: "They (the Stoics) divide propositions in this way: of propositions, they say, some are possible, others impossible, of the possible, some are necessary, others non-necessary, again of the non-necessary, some are possible and others impossible, foolishly and recklesssly deciding that the possible is both a genus and a species of the non-necessary."[2] In the chart below I have reconstructed this diaeresis, using the definitions of the terms and the examples given by Diogenes Laertius.[3]

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[1] For the fragments of the Old Stoa I have used H. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Berlin, 1905, and I have referred to them by the number of the book and fragment. The categories are listed by Simplicius (II.369), and Plotinus (II.371).

[2] Boethius, *Commentarii in Librum Aristotelis De Interpretatione* edited by C. Meiser, Leipzig, 1877, 393, lines 14-20. *Dividunt enim enuntiationes hoc modo: enuntiationum, inquiunt, aliae sunt possibliles, aliae impossibiles, possibilium aliae sunt necessariae, aliae non necessariae, rursus non necessariarum aliae sunt possibiles, aliae vero impossibiles: stulte atque improvide idem possibile et genus non necessarii et speciem constituentes.*

[3] D.L. VII.75. See my article, "Fate and Possibility in Early Stoic Philosophy," *Phoenix*, 19, 1965, 291-5.

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Possible:
The possible is that which admits of being true if the external circumstances do not prevent it from being true, as, for example, "Diocles lives."

Impossible:
The impossible is that which does not admit of being true, as, for example, "The earth is flying."

Necessary:
The necessary is that which, being true, does not admit of being false, or which does admit of it, but external circumstances prevent it from being false, as, for example, "Virtue benefits."

Non-necessary:
The non-necessary is that which is both true and capable of being false, if external circumstances do not prevent it, as, for example, "Dion walks."

Possible:
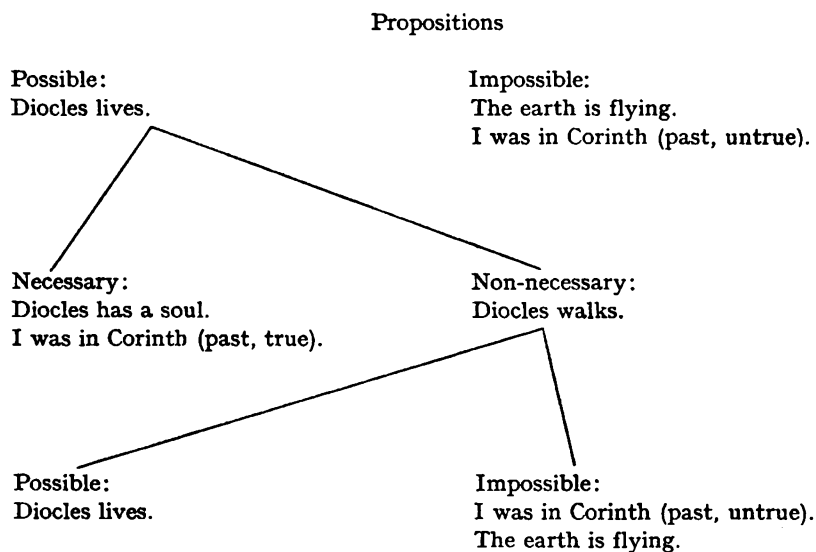For example, "Diocles lives."

Impossible:
For example, "The earth is flying."

In my discussion of necessary propositions in *Phoenix*,[4] I argued that "Virtue benefits" is a necessary proposition because "benefiting" is a principal cause inhering in its substratum, virtue, and the cause of the predicate "benefits." The quality or principal cause exists in its substratum by fate. "Virtue benefits," therefore, is a necessary proposition because the predicate is derived from the principal cause inherent by fate in the subject. In order that I may show more easily the relationship among the various terms in this diaeresis, I would like to substitute for "Virtue benefits" a necessary proposition related to the term "lives." Such a proposition would be "Diocles has a soul." In this case, "soul" is a principal cause present in the subject Diocles. In my earlier article, I pointed out also that the example, "Virtue benefits," refers to the first part of Diogenes' definition of a necessary proposition, "that which, being true, does not admit of being false." As an example to illustrate the second part of the definition, "that which, being true, does admit of being false, but external circumstances prevent it from being false," I suggested a true proposition about the past, as, for example, "I was in Corinth" or "The gem was broken."

[4] Op. cit. in n. 3, page 293.

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In addition to the definition of an impossible proposition given by Diogenes we have a definition from Boethius' *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione:* "The impossible is that which never admits of any truth since other things outside prevent the realization of it."[5] As an example of a proposition illustrating Boethius' definition I suggested, in my earlier article, an untrue proposition in past time such as, "I was in Corinth."

Using the above examples we may reconstruct for Boethius' diaeresis the following:

Propositions

Possible:
Diocles lives.

Impossible:
The earth is flying.
I was in Corinth (past, untrue).

Necessary:
Diocles has a soul.
I was in Corinth (past, true).

Non-necessary:
Diocles walks.

Possible:
Diocles lives.

Impossible:
I was in Corinth (past, untrue).
The earth is flying.

According to Simplicius some of the Stoics defined the qualified (*poion*) in three ways: (1) that which is in a state of movement according to the differentia, e.g. the runner; (2) that which is in a certain condition according to the differentia, e.g. the man who has been posted in an advanced position; and (3) that which is in a permanent condition according to the differentia, e.g. the wise man. The third group alone is said to be commensurate with the quality.[6] At the end of this passage Simplicius writes: "Although the qualified, therefore, is said to be of three kinds, the quality (*poiotēs*) according to the last kind of

[5] Boethius, *Comm. in Arist. De Interp.* 235, 1-3. See op. cit. in n. 3, page 294.
[6] 2.390. On this passage see my article, "The Stoic Categories," *A.J.P.* 78, 1957, 74-5.

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qualified is commensurate with the qualified. *Therefore, when they define the quality as a disposition of the qualified* (*schesin poiou*), *we must understand by this definition that the third kind of qualified is meant.*" If we compare this classification with our diaeresis we see that the example, "Diocles lives," corresponds to Simplicius' third class, and the example, "Diocles walks," to Simplicius' first group.

Evidence that the particular quality (*idia poiotês*) was derived from the *poion* of the individually qualified entity is found in passages from Chrysippus. Chrysippus argued that virtue was formed by its own particular quality (*idia poiotês*) according to the qualified *kata to poion* (III.255). He introduced a whole swarm of virtues. He derived from manly, manliness, from gentle, gentleness, from just, justice, from gracious, graciousness, from good, goodness, from large, large-ness, and from noble, nobility (III.255). These *poia* were all permanent conditions. The virtues themselves are qualified (*poia*) just as the particular individuals are qualified, and the qualifications of the virtues are derived from those of the individual. This explains why Chrysippus could speak of the differentiation of the virtues (III.259), or give one of his books the title, *Concerning the fact that the Virtues are Qualified* (*poias* III.256). The *poion* individualized the individual or action and the same *poion* gave the virtue its particular quality.
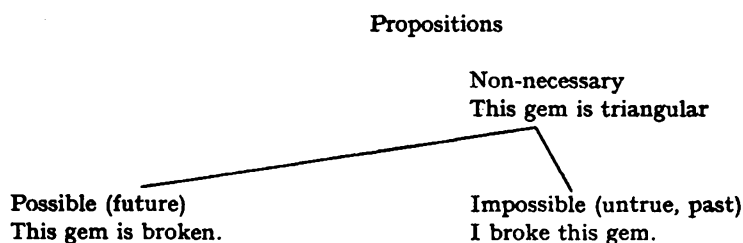
We can now, I believe, understand the connection between "lives" in the proposition, "Diocles lives," and "soul" in the proposition, "Diocles has a soul." "Soul" is a particular quality (*idia poiotês*) formed according to the qualified (*poion*), "lives" (III.255). Or if we follow Simplicius' account, "soul" is a quality (*poiotês*) commensurate with the qualified (*poion*), "lives," and the quality, "soul," is a disposition of the qualified, "lives" (II.390). In the Stoic diaeresis each term added a qualification to the preceding term and each term was more highly differentiated than the preceding one.[7] It would follow, therefore, that the more highly differentiated quality, "soul," would have as its substratum the *poion*, "lives."

The same interpretation can be used to explain the fact that the *poion*, "lives," was the substratum for the *poion*, "walks." The first is a permanent characteristic and the second a non-necessary characteristic. It would be in accordance with the method employed in the Stoic diaeresis to assume that the non-necessary or more highly

[7] For the Stoic diaeresis see O. Rieth, *Grundbegriffe der Stoischen Ethik*, Berlin, 1933, 22-9 and 45-51.

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differentiated term should be a qualification of the permanent characteristic.

It is more difficult to explain why Boethius' diaeresis represented the non-necessary proposition as the genus of the possible and impossible propositions. An answer may perhaps be found in a statement in Stobaeus which records that the present was distinguished from the past and the future by Chrysippus. Stobaeus writes: "He (Chrysippus) says that only the present exists (*hyparchein*) and that the past and the future subsist (*hyphestanai*) and he says that these do not exist at all, *because accidents alone are said to exist as predicates*. For example, "walking" exists when I am walking, but it does not exist when I have lain down or am sitting down" (II.509, cf. 518 and 519). In the non-necessary proposition, "Diocles walks," the predicate, "walks," is an accident which exists in present time. Impossible and possible propositions included propositions which dealt with past and future events. I have already pointed out that an untrue proposition in past time was regarded as an impossible proposition.[8] Possible propositions were future propositions. Evidence for this is to be found in the following passage from Cicero's *De Fato* (II.954): "You (Chrysippus) say that what is not going to happen can happen, so that this gem can be broken, even if it is never going to be." In this case, the proposition, "This gem is broken," describes a possible future event. We can, therefore, reconstruct this part of Boethius' diaeresis using Cicero's examples, as follows:

<div align="center">Propositions</div>

Non-necessary
This gem is triangular

Possible (future)
This gem is broken.

Impossible (untrue, past)
I broke this gem.

The word *hyphestanai* which Chrysippus applies to the past and future has the connotation "dependent upon." Sextus describes "that which is signified" as "dependent upon" (*paryphistamenon*) our thought (II.166), and he defines the *lekton* as "that which is dependent upon (*hyphistamenon*) the cognitive presentation" (II.187). Because a proposition refering to the past or future requires memory or inference,

[8] See above, page 280.

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it is dependent upon our thought and is more highly differentiated than a proposition refering to the present. Past and future propositions, therefore, are qualifications of the non-necessary proposition which describes the existent *poion* in present time, and they are later terms in the hierarchy which forms the diaeresis.

Two passages from Dexippus' *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories* and from Syrian's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* refer to the distinction which the Stoics made between the *koinôs poion* and the *idiôs poion*. The passage from Dexippus reads as follows: "First, the so-called primary substratum, the unqualified matter – and a second substratum, the "qualified" (*poion*), which subsists as a common or a particular substratum (ὃ κοινῶς ἢ ἰδίως ὑφίσταται II.374). And again, the sentence from Syrian reads: "The Stoics make the generically qualified prior to the individually qualified" (τοὺς κοινῶς ποιοὺς πρὸ τῶν ἰδίως ποιῶν II.398).

Should we assume that the *koinôs poion* was what Simplicius called "that which is permanent according to the differentia" (II.390)? In that case, "lives" in our diaeresis would be the *koinôs poion* and "walks" the *idiôs poion*. There are several reasons for rejecting this interpretation. First Chrysippus defines a definition as the "attribution of the particular qualification" (ἡ τοῦ ἰδίου ἀπόδοσις II.226). Since "that which is permanent according to the differentia" (e.g. "lives") would be used in the definition, it should be regarded as the *idiôs poion* rather that the *koinôs poion*.[9] Again, if "lives" were the *koinôs poion*, then the *idia poiotês*, i.e. "soul," would be formed from the *koinôs poion* rather than from the *idiôs poion*. This would appear to be very unlikely.

Where, then, should we look for the *koinôs poion*? I argued earlier that the *idia poiotês*, "soul," was formed from the *idiôs poion*, "lives." If this is true, we would expect that the *koinê poiotês* would be formed from the *koinôs poion*. Unfortunately. we have very little evidence for the *koinê poiotês*. The term, however, seems to have referred to the species or genus; for Diogenes of Babylon defined a *prosêgoria* as a part of speech indicating a common quality (*koinê poiotês*) such as man or horse (III.22). In our diaeresis the common quality should be the

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[9] The paradox of the "footless man" (II.397) can, I believe, be explained by the distinction between the *idiôs poion* which is "permanent according to the differentia" (e.g. "lives"), and the *idiôs poion* which is non-permanent (e.g. "walks"). "Footless" was a non-permanent or accidental *idiôs poion* and consequently should not have been used to construct a definition of the particular (*idiôs poios*).

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species, "soul."[10] What, then, would be the *koinôs poion* from which it was formed? I would suggest that it was "lives," and I would reconstruct the hierarchy as follows:

Lives (*koinôs poion*)

soul (*koinê poiotês*)   lives (*idiôs poion*)

soul (*idia poiotês*)   walks (*idiôs poion*)
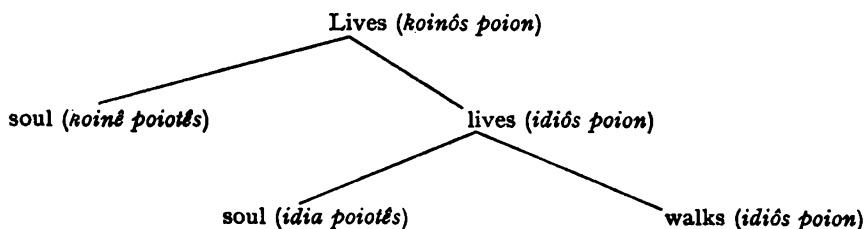
Are we correct in arguing that a term such as "lives" could be both the *koinôs poion* and the *idiôs poion*? Chrysippus seems to have referred to the pleasant (ἡδύ) as both a *koinôs poion* and an *idiôs poion*. A sentence in Aëtius reads: "Chrysippus (said) that the generic pleasant was intelligible, but that the pleasant which pertains to the species and falls upon the senses is perceptible" (II.81). If the "pleasant" were both a *koinôs poion* and an *idiôs poion* in Chryippus' teachings, then a term such as, "lives," could have been used in both senses.

In this paper I have stated my reasons for believing that the *idiôs poion*, the *koinôs poion*, the *idia poiotês*, and the *koinê poiotês* all have a place in the second Stoic category and that the relationship of one term to another can be reconstructed from Boethius' diaeresis.

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[10] The particular quality, for example, courage, had as its substratum the quality, virtue. This is clear from Chrysippus' statement that virtue was a substance (*ousia*) which suffered a change according to its qualities (III.259). We find also that the substratum of virtue was the *hegemonikon* (Sext. Emp. *Math.* XI/23), and that the substratum of soul was the *pneuma* (II.806). If we assume that the substratum of the *hegemonikon* was soul, we can reconstruct a series of substrata going back to the *pneuma:* particular virtue, virtue, *hegemonikon*, soul. and *pneuma*. Each one of these was a substratum and a quality. It would seem reasonable to suppose that all, except the particular virtue, were common qualities.

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